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C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 001279

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HQSOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD
DEPARTMENT PASS TO AID/OTI (RPORTER)
DEPARTMENT PASS TO DRL (SMOODY)

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SUBJECT: STUDENTS END HUNGER STRIKE

REF: CARACAS 01269

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBIN D. MEYER
REASON 1.4 (D)

11. (SBU) Summary: The 7 day student-led hunger strike, initially launched on September 24 as a protest against the arrest of student activist Julio Rivas, ended late the evening of September 30. The students called off the protest and claimed victory, stating that their demands had been fully met: Rivas had been released (reftel) and the Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS), Jose Miguel Insulza, reportedly expressed concern for the students and suggested they meet with OAS officials in Washington. Student groups called for a march in Caracas on October 3 to protest the continued detention of political prisoners. End Summary.

INSULZA'S (LUKE WARM) INVITATION

12. (SBU) In comments to the press from Washington immediately before the end of the hunger strike, OAS Secretary General Jose Miguel Insulza told journalists that he was concerned about the hunger-strikers: "How can I not be concerned about having 160 young people in front of OAS headquarters, in Caracas?" He noted that the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) had asked to come to Venezuela several times but that the GBRV had not agreed to issue an invitation. "That's the reality." He also said that "unfortunately the IACHR cannot go to a country without having an invitation or authorization." (Note: The last visit by the IACHR to Venezuela was in May 2002. End Note.) The Commission has repeatedly requested, both verbally and in writing, the consent of the Government of Venezuela for a visit without success. Insulza also said that "it wouldn't be wrong for the students to present their demands and petitions to the IACHR headquarters or transmit them in another way... Let them (the students) come. Let the student delegation come to Washington to speak with the IACHR, or be interviewed by its personnel or the rapporteur for the country. I am sure that they would be received."

STUDENTS DECLARE VICTORY; END HUNGER STRIKE

13. (SBU) Student spokesperson Rebeca Rojas announced at 9PM, September 30, that in light of the public comments by Secretary General Insulza, the demonstrators had fully achieved their objectives and were ending their week long hunger strike. Rojas characterized Insulza's comments as an invitation for a student delegation to meet with IACHR

officials in Washington. Rojas called for students to march in Caracas on October 3 to demand that the government permit a site visit by the IACHR and to protest the continued detention of political prisoners. Rojas told supporters, "This fight does not end today. This is for the Venezuelan people, not a fight of colors, but it is about feeling Venezuelan and being born in this country."

¶4. (C) On October 1, Ligia Bolivar, the Director of the Human Rights Center of the Universidad Catolica Andres Bello, told post that the Center was helping to prepare the student delegation for the visit to the IACHR and asked for expedited visa processing for some of the students without visas. She said she wanted the students to meet with Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), Human Rights Watch, and the Center for Justice and International Law while in Washington.

¶5. (C) Comment: The student led hunger strike gave the opposition and student movement a minor symbolic win. However, Insulza notably stopped short of demanding the GBRV let the IACHR in the country. In essence, given the unlikely prospect that the GBRV would release additional prisoners, the students wisely declared victory and moved on to efforts to engage the OAS. End Comment.

DUDDY